

Exploring the Community Forest Path

The Community Forest Path (CFP) was devised in association with the Forest of Avon with the avowed intent of leading people out of the city into the countryside. Since its inception people have wondered whether it is possible to cover its 45 miles within a day. One of the earliest to show that it was possible was Bristolian conceptual artist, Richard Long who completed a circuit in 16 hours in 1998 as part of one of his pieces.

More lately, the challenge to complete the circuit has been formalised as the Green Man Challenge and those who have succeeded have been certified as Woodwose. 48 Woodwoses have been certified so far as I write.

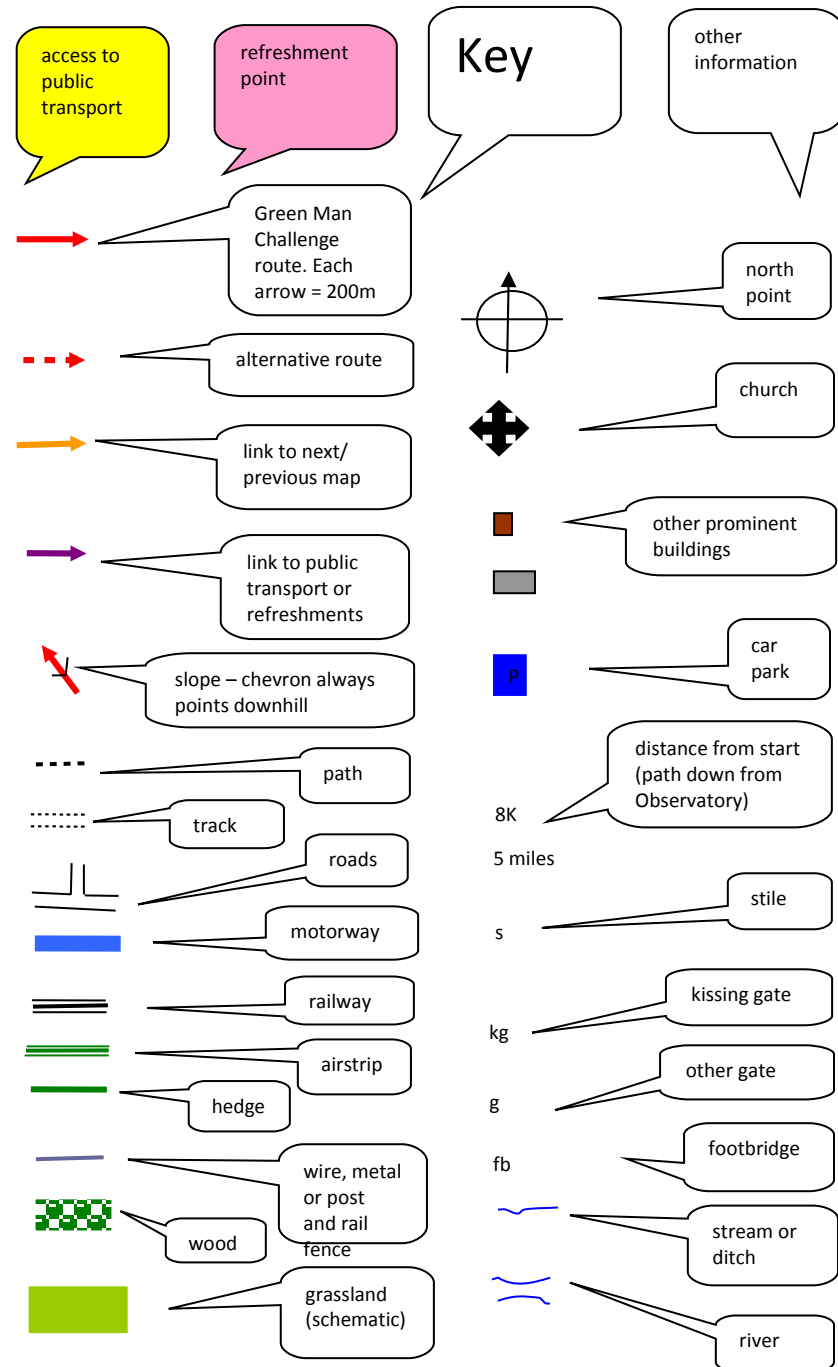
The original map of the Community Forest Path is now out of print, so these maps, which have more in common with vector diagrams than they do with conventional plans are offered as a substitute, pending a new official leaflet.

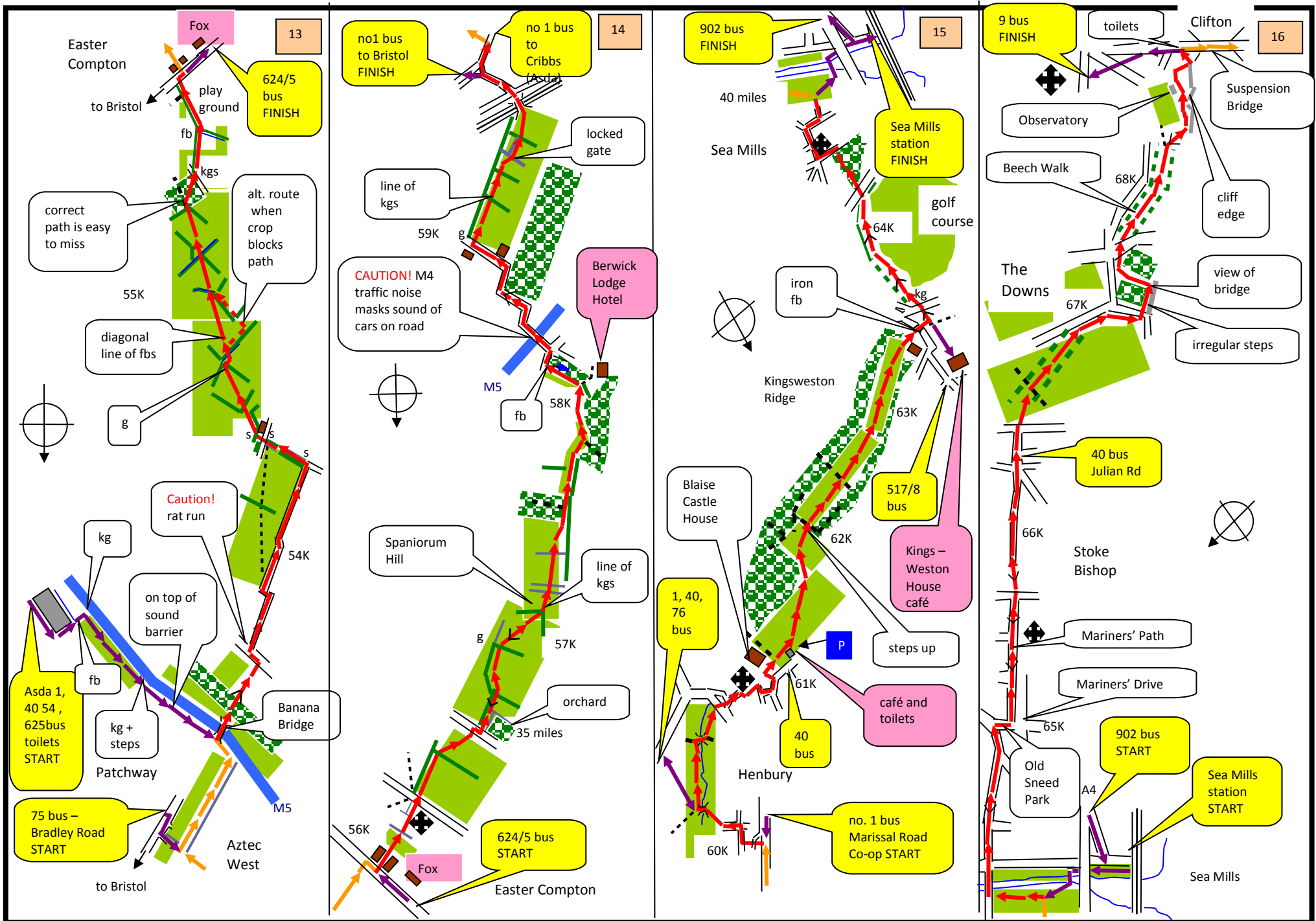
The aim of these maps is fourfold.

- 1) They should help to lead people out of the city into the countryside. They do this by demonstrating how manageable chunks of the CFP can be accessed, always a problem with long distance paths, by using public transport.
- 2) They should enable people to interact with the communities they pass through by visiting cafés and public houses.
- 3) They should assist people attempting to beat the Green Man Challenge by introducing them to the route in stages.
- 4) They should help people who are in the process of attempting the Green Man Challenge. (But do not attempt this without reading warnings on www.closetothecountryside.co.uk)

In each strip, the route is shown by a series of arrows, which show the direction of travel from bottom to top. Each arrow represents 200m, regardless of its length, so that space is stretched in complicated places and compressed where you can't go wrong (with any luck!). The idea is that the maps are always orientated correctly in relation to your direction of travel. Also, it ought to be easier to keep your place.

It is hoped that these strips will work on their own, but they have been written by a fallible human being and will be read by fallible human beings, so you will need to carry OS maps (155 and 167 – 154 is also helpful) with you in case you stray from the path. To help you to refer to the relevant OS map, we have included north point on the maps and there are Grid References in the notes.





1 – Clifton Suspension Bridge to Colliter’s Brook and Bedminster Down – Buses 8, (9) 486 and 487 at start, 75 (or 25) at finish

Access route via number 8 bus from Temple Meads or the Centre to Christchurch, Clifton. (Number 9 bus makes the same trip in the opposite direction, which involves a diversion through Cotham.) 486 and 487 buses also stop at Christchurch and link to Kingswood and north central Bristol. return to Centre using 75 bus.

From number 8 bus stop, cross green to start point past toilets near Clifton Suspension Bridge where Community Forest Path (CFP) descends from Observatory past the sliding rock known as the Tailor’s Friend.

This is the most complicated map of all due to the fact that there are no officially recognised ‘Public Rights of Way’ through the Ashton Court Estate, which means that the lodge gates are shut at night, a problem for a 24-hour challenge. So the challenge route has to diverge from the CFP.

Refreshments are available on the challenge route at the café at the back of Ashton Court and at the Dovecote and at the Angel on the CFP route.

There are two or three potential routes up to Bedminster Down, where the 75 bus provides a frequent and reliable service back to the centre. The Cross Hands is a good Greene King Local, which provides inexpensive food and had a cider festival on when I visited. The shortest route goes through a site that used to be a travellers camp, which has been developed into permanent dwellings. The entrance over the stream appeared to be blocked by Heras security fencing, but it was easy to get through. The alternative longer route is more useful to those reconnoitring the route of the Green Man Challenge.

The main attraction on this part of the route is Brunel’s Suspension Bridge, a familiar Bristol City icon. The views as you go across are splendid, but it probably looks better looking back from Bedminster Down near the toilets. In some lights you can imagine the outline of the window of Vincent’s Chapel below the Observatory. The giant Vincent, the legendary digger of the Avon Gorge is more likely to represent Gwyn Sant or Holy Gwyn, the Welsh god Gwyn mab Nudd, who is associated with calendar myths and the Severn Bore.

In spite of the caustic opinion of Michael Jenner, Ashton Court, the Smyth mansion is worth a look as you pass.

GR start ST559731, end ST559697

2 – Up to Dundry

– Buses 75 (or 25) at start 75 (or 30) at finish

I have never really understood why so many people have problems with this section, but the fact that do should warn you to study this plan and the OS map carefully. It could be that the tower of Dundry Parish Church lures people off course, or perhaps they haven’t got their eye in yet!

The reliable 75 bus links either end of this section. The 75 also serves the Challenge route in Patchway, which means that you can access the whole 15 mile western section of the route using this bus. The closest point for me to access the 75 is near the Wellington hotel on Horfield Common, which suggests an interesting itinerary, but I’d want to be sure I knew the section up to Dundry before I attempted it!

The best place to get off the 75 is round the corner from the Cross Hands in Bishopsworth Road.

The places where most mistakes seem to happen are where the trail turns right over a stile a couple of fields after you pass the Town and Country Motel on the A38. Some people also miss the boggy gap in the hedge leading up to Dundry Lane, so take care there. The brambles near Colliter’s Brook can also be tricky, if they haven’t been cut back recently.

The highlights of this section are the views back towards the Suspension Bridge from Dundry Down (and from Bedminster Down near the toilets) and the new menu at the Dundry Inn. The views along the escarpment from the church are also spectacular, but this section is marred by poor maintenance and litter.

The exit onto Oxleaze Lane does not go where it should, but work to put this right is in the pipeline. Unfortunately, there has been a holdup of some sort.

Although the wait for the bus in Withywood is short, there is no pub or café nearby, so I would be inclined to visit the Dundry Inn first and then walk down to the bus stop.

GR start: ST559697 end: ST564667

3 + 4 Dundry/Withywood to Pensford

- Buses 75 at start 376 at finish

There is no pub or bus stop in or near Norton Hawkfield and Norton Malreward, so the two maps need to be taken together. The reliable 75 provides access to this route, whilst the 376 is a reliable half hourly service to the bus station from Wells (at least during the week). The pubs and shop in Pensford mean that it is not an uncomfortable place to wait if you get your timing right. In addition, the proximity of the bus station to Stokes Croft means that it is easy enough to link back to the 75 bus and create a circle.

You need the Sherrin Way bus stop in Four Acres Withywood. It is quite a climb up Strawberry Lane to join the CFP, but the rest of the route is predominantly downhill through attractive countryside.

Some versions of the CFP show the route going through the grounds of some houses in East Dundry, but we prefer the route down the road for the Green Man Challenge. The route through Walnut Tree Farm is unavoidable, however. A new kissing gate means that it is now possible to follow the path to the left of the wire fence as shown on the OS map.

The rest of the route is straight forward, although you need to be careful crossing the airstrip and descending to the B3130.

The official CFP goes to the right as the Challenge route approaches the River Chew to join the 2 Rivers Way. We have chosen to follow the 3 Peaks Walk instead at this point, because it is more wooded, but more importantly, because it leads to a safer pedestrian crossing of the A37.

There are three pubs in Pensford, The Rising Sun, the George and Dragon and the Travellers' Rest. On our last visit, the Rising Sun wasn't serving lunch during the week, so we went to the George and Dragon, where I had a superb pint of Arbor Ale, a ham salad baguette and a Belgian bun. It could be this pub is coming out of a lean patch. The Travellers' Rest in the hamlet of Belluton on the hill out of Pensford towards Bristol probably has the best food, but it is quite a long way off the Challenge route. If you want to get there, it is difficult to follow the PROW shown on the OS map. It is often better to go to the top of the rocky track and turn left along a conservation headland to the footpath down the hill.

GR start ST564667, Norton Hawkfield ST592648, finish ST620637

5 + 6 Pensford to Keynsham

- Buses 376 at start, 349 and 318 at finish (also 339)

There is no useful bus service to Compton Dando, but there is good food to be had at the Compton Inn, so one natural course is to explore this section of the walk and stop for lunch half way. The running route avoids the churchyard and hence the pub.

Access to Keynsham is via the 376 to Wells bus from Bristol bus station. Get off at Pensford bridge.

The straightforward route follows the River Chew, which provides the main attraction on this section, on the 2 Rivers Way.

The traditional stage end is at the Lockkeeper on the road to Bitton. But we have chosen to put that on the next sheet to make room to show more details of the possibilities of Keynsham, in particular the stop for the 349 back to Bristol, which stops at Temple Meads and Union Street among other places. The Union Street stop is only a short walk from the bus station.

The train station in Keynsham is also close to the finish of this section, which will be favoured by railway buffs, although it is not a very frequent service.

GR start ST620637, Compton Dando ST647647, finish Keynsham ST657687

7 – Keynsham to London Road

- Buses 349, 318 and 339 at start 43 and 319 at finish

This section begins at Keynsham parish church, a landmark in the town where the 349 bus from Union Street Bristol sets down. The 339 from Bath also sets down here (although one version turns into the 318 before getting there.) The 318 also provides a link from Cribbs Causeway bus station via Parkway and UWE Frenchay Campus. Some people may use the nearby train station.

Wherever you arrive, you will go through the Keynsham Memorial Park to pick up the Challenge route to the Lockkeeper, which is a popular place to support Green Man Challengers.

There are two possible routes across the meadows to the Londonderry Wharf, which is the terminus of the Dramway Path. This is one reason to prefer the

Dramway route over the CFP at this point, but the main reason is the going is better underfoot and the crossing of the main road ahead is safer.

The red arrows are very close together on the Bristol and Bath Railway Path, which means it is longer than it looks. The swap onto the Dramway Path leads to a more interesting experience.

There are a couple of pubs on the London Road, one of which is also an Indian restaurant. There are also public toilets and a café attached to the Railway Path.

You can catch the 43 bus back into Bristol here or the 319, which will return you to UWE, Parkway and Cribbs Causeway in one direction or Bath in the other

GR start ST657687 finish ST671734

8 – London Road to Emerson’s Green

- Buses 43 and 319 at start, 48, 49, 517 and 518 at finish

If you have started here, you could have arrived by the 43 or 319 bus, or might have parked in the car park, with the intention of going on to Parkway or Cribbs Causeway and getting the 319 back. In which case I should warn you that Cribbs Causeway is not a friendly place for pedestrians.

This is a section where more people have gone wrong than any other, but I am not sure why that is. It could be that the fact that the CFP studiously avoids Warmley Forest Park puts people off! Some people might find it easier to go straight up through the Forest Park and rejoin near Goose Green, but then you would miss a good bit of the Dramway Path. It might be that in the long run, we will alter the route to take in more of the Warmley Forest Path and go up through the new planting to Siston Court and then on Gingell’s Farm on Shortwood Hill.

However, that is not where the route goes at the moment, although several people have spent a long and frustrating time diverting off in that direction. I think the new mapping is clear at this point, but many would disagree so take care!

One person was also seduced by a path onto Mangotsfield Golf Course, due to an ambiguous CFP arrow.

Once on Shortwood Hill, the path up through the plantation is quite clear at the moment, but path clearing at the top has obscured the kissing gate at the top, so be careful not to be drawn off to the right.

Once you get past the quarry to the remains of Brandy Bottom Pit, you have a choice. Turn right if you are going on to Park Lane and Parkway. Turn left if you are stopping at Emerson’s Green.

If you are going to Emerson’s Green, you are going to have to tackle crossing the ring road. The direct crossing is safe enough if there is little traffic, but if it is heavy, you may have to head right to the footbridge over it.

It is worth it if you want to get back to the Westbury area by using the 517 or 518 or to the centre on the 48 or 49. If you find you have just missed the bus and you need to wait there is a café in Sainsbury’s and a rather better one (a Costa I think) just around the corner.

GR start ST671734 finish ST682771

9 – Emerson’s Green to Park Lane

- Buses 48, 49, 517 and 518 at start, 342, X42, 85 at finish

If you are starting here, you could have arrived on a 48 or 49 bus from the centre, or you might be planning to exploit the possibilities of the 517 and 518 buses. These buses link to Parkway Railway Station, which is 10K away and Kingsweston House about 16 miles away. If you live to the north of Bristol, this may be easier than going in and out of the centre.

In any case, you need to be aware of the dangers of crossing the ring road on the level. It is safer to use the footbridge, which adds about 800m to the route.

You join the CFP (and the Dramway Path) at Brandy Bottom Colliery, whose remains will remind you that the South Gloucestershire coalfield is beneath your feet. The coalfield is the reason the Dramway was built in the first place. You will see further evidence of coal working on your right before you go under the motorway, and the bushes between two fishing lakes on the other side conceal the remains of another pit.

The route is pretty flat through this area, but there is usually wildlife to see if you keep your eyes open. There is a small herd of roe deer that often appears on the little frequented stretch between the motorway and the fishing lakes, and the attractively landscaped lakes on the golf course attract waterfowl, including

Canada Geese. There are usually cattle including a harmless bull and sometimes ponies in the fields coming up to Henfield.

Some people have gone wrong in the Kendleshire Golf Club. You should be alright if you remember that the path has been diverted to avoid the fairways in the first section. You need to look both ways before crossing the fairway to Park Lane in the second.

You can catch the 342 or X42 bus here, which runs between Yate and Bristol Bus Station. The 85, which runs between Yate and Emerson's Green could also be useful if you need to get back there. If you miss the bus, there is sometimes a snack wagon in the lay by.

GR start ST682771 finish ST665798

10 – Park Lane to Parkway

- Buses X42, 342, 85 at start, 73, 517, 518 at finish

The main attraction on this stretch is a section of the Frome Valley Walkway between Huckford Viaduct and Hambrook. However, it would be wise to remember that the word 'Frome' means torrent, and the path is liable to flood after heavy rainfall. Even after the waters subside, the path can remain muddy and slippery close to the waters edge. There is also a section below Winterbourne Down where the footpath is closed and you need to take a more dubious path below it. However, a walk or run along side the river is always interesting and if you are very lucky, you may be rewarded by a flash of electric blue as a kingfisher dives off a perch into the rapids.

This section can be accessed using the bus services between Bristol bus station and Yate/Chipping Sodbury. The 342 stops at Park Lane and the 327 and 329 in Hambrook. However, I would expect most people will start at Emerson's Green and carry on through to Parkway, where they can catch a 517 or 518 back or a 73 back into town.

Navigation is quite straightforward in this section, but problems with brambles and other undergrowth have been reported on the descent from Ivory House, on the cut through from Sunnyside Lane and under the M4. Nettles can also be a hazard on the shorter Green man Challenge route to the railway crossing, which suggests the slightly longer route on the road might be preferable in the summer months.

The official CFP route takes in a look off the Frome Walkway up to Bury Hill fort. This seems unnecessary to me, although you might consider it worth a visit. The banks of the fort are not easy to make out.

The two different routes into Parkway Station reflect differences between the needs of the CFP and the Green Man Challenge route. The CFP must always have had a link to Parkway Station in mind, otherwise the longer route around the fields makes no sense. One attraction of the station for long distance walkers is the presence of a breakfast served in the early hours of the morning (apparently).

It is also a transport hub with links to Keynsham and Emerson's Green via the 318 and 517/8 buses and to the centre via the 73 and of course the train.

GR start ST665798 finish ST630798

11 + 12 – Parkway to Patchway via Bradley Stoke

- Buses 73, 517 and 518 at start, 75, 1 and 40 at finish

This suburban stretch of the CFP is not without its attractions, but it is, nevertheless, a stretch to get through rather than to look forward to.

Parkway Station is a major transport hub, which makes it an excellent place to access the Community Forest Path. The 318/9 goes on to Cribb's Causeway bus station, but the pedestrian links to the Community Forest Path are not good enough to recommend. The 517/8 bus, on the other hand, opens up the whole northern section, because you can catch it on Kings Weston Road or indeed in Westbury on Trym. You could park a car there and catch the bus to Parkway (it's a half hourly service) and make your way back on foot (11 to 13 miles.)

If you arrive by the 73 bus, the very frequent 75 from Patchway will get you back to Horfield and the Centre.

It is easy to get from the CFP to the Bradley Stoke Leisure Centre and the Willow Brook Centre, where there is a 24 hour Tesco. However, the 71 and 72 buses that serve the Centre have alternating 20 min and 40 min intervals and are not close to the best café to wait in, which is at the Leisure Centre. If you have to catch a bus in Bradley Stoke, the Bradley Stoke Surgery on Brook Way is probably your best bet.

The recommended route onto the CFP includes a glimpse of the countryside before you set off into the suburbs. It is easy to miss the turning to the left at the

grassy triangle after Winterbourne Road, but I don't know where else you could go wrong. It is not a good idea to avoid the underpass under the A38 by trying to climb the barrier in the middle.

The route off the CFP to Cribbs Causeway goes along the top of the berm or bund that provides a sound barrier to protect the houses of Patchway from the noise of the M5. It is noisy, but it provides excellent views over to Wales.

The 75 bus is the best choice if you need to get back to Horfield and the Centre or Hartcliffe/Withywood, whereas the 1 and the 40 get you back to the centre via Westbury or Shirehampton.

GR start ST630798 Bradley Stoke ST623822, finish ST594825

13 + 14 – Patchway to Henbury via Easter Compton

Buses 75, 1 and 40 at start, 1 at end (76 and 40) 624/5 in middle

This is a purely rural interlude to the west of the M5, originally abstracted from the Community Forest Path to connect the number 1 bus service, which has stops at ASDA in Cribbs Causeway and Station Road, Henbury and goes through Westbury on Trym to the Centre. However, it would work the same way if you used the 40 bus, which also stops at ASDA and Blaise Castle.

On the other hand, this section can also be accessed from the Gloucester Road area, by using the 75 to Patchway and catching the 76 back from Crow Lane.

The highlights of this route are associated with views across the Severn towards Wales. Views across to the Severn Crossings can be enjoyed from many places including the sound barrier alongside the M5 and in Ash Lane. Spaniorum Hill also provides enticing glimpses of Wales set off by industrial buildings in Avonmouth.

There are opportunities for refreshments at the Fox Easter Compton and at Berwick Lodge, which is fishing for a Michelin Star if it hasn't already been awarded.

There are few navigational challenges on this section, except for the easy to miss footpath in Wheat Hill Farm Wood. Brambles tend to obstruct the footpath between Ash Lane and Over Lane, but this can be by passed by using the

alternative path through the fields. there is currently a locked gate in the horse fields between Berwick Lane and Henbury.

GR start ST594825, Easter Compton ST572824, finish ST564794

15 + 16 – Henbury to Clifton

Buses 1, 40 and 76 at start 9 (8) 486 and 487 at end – (40, 517/8, 902 and train in between)

This section goes through the crown jewels of Bristol's green treasury, the Blaise Estate and the Durdham and Clifton Downs. It also passes the grave of Scipio Africanus in Henbury churchyard, descends Shirehampton Park Golf Course, penetrates Three Acre Covert, ascends Mariners Walk and discovers unexpected views of the Clifton Suspension Bridge.

As the whole section is within the City of Bristol, it is easy to access by a number of different buses and a train (at Sea Mills).

From the Centre, you would probably join using the number one bus to Station Road Henbury because it is a good ten minutes quicker than the 40, and you'd catch the 9 from Christchurch back to the centre when you'd finished the route.

The number 40 covers a section of the route from Henbury to Julian Road. This would make a short but strenuous walk that might fruitfully be extended to the café and toilets by the water tower, which is visible to the left at the top of Julian Road.

Railway buffs will probably access the route from Sea Mills station and pick their way through Clifton to Clifton Down Station at the end, a route that there is no room to describe here.

On the other hand, If you live on the Gloucester Road side of Bristol, you might catch the 76 to Crow Lane and then catch the 486 or the 487 from Christchurch back to Muller Road top, which is convenient if you want to pop into the Wellie! However, this bus stops running in the early evening and doesn't run on Sundays.

Most of the refreshment opportunities on this route are at the beginning or concentrated at the end in Clifton Village. However, Kingsweston House, just off the route will be the target of those who are using the 517/8 to explore the northern part of the CFP.

GR start 564794, Sea Mills ST550761, finish ST559731